



**CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF
THE AIR MEDAL**

TO

**RUSSELL W. GRIZZARD
AVIATION SURVIVAL TECHNICIAN SECOND CLASS
UNITED STATES COAST GUARD**

Petty Officer GRIZZARD is cited for heroic achievement in aerial flight on 29 May 2021 while serving as Rescue Swimmer aboard Coast Guard helicopter CGNR 6501. Following passage of a severe thunderstorm, the crew of CGNR 6501 responded to a report of a grounded vessel beset by gale force winds and heavy surf near the jetties of Matagorda Bay Channel. The crew arrived on scene shortly after midnight to find two survivors clinging to the stern rigging of the S/V NAMELA REYNA as it was pounded by the heavy surf. After impacting the mast during the initial attempted deployment, Petty Officer GRIZZARD was safely deployed up-wind and up-swell of the vessel. Battling through crashing waves and gusting wind, he reached the pitching vessel and assessed the survivors. Upon identifying the weakest survivor, he guided her over the vessel and towed her through churning water to the awaiting rescue basket. Despite losing a fin in the evolution, he swam back to the vessel, where the remaining survivor handed him a pet in a carrier that he placed in the basket. As he battled through the waves to recover the remaining survivor, the vessel rolled 90 degrees due to the relentless surf and was now almost completely submerged with a broken mast. Recognizing the deteriorating conditions, he pulled the exhausted survivor into the water and negotiated the rigging and debris to save his life. His actions and skill were instrumental in the rescue of two mariners and their pet. His courage, judgment, and devotion to duty are most heartily commended and are in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Coast Guard.